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ABSTRACT

This paper constitutes a summary of the major topics discussed by the nearly 500 librarians, information specialists, representatives of the information industry, and other interested individuals who participated in a national forum for the identification, elucidation, and discussion of issues relating to library networks, as a contribution to the creation of an action agenda on library networking for the White House Conference. Based on position papers prepared in advance and distributed to participants at the conference, comments made during six scheduled discussion sessions by members of the audience, and data gathered through a questionnaire distributed to all conference participants, the paper provides brief summaries of discussions on financing the national network; the structure of the national network and access to its services; network governance; and education, research, and development. Participants recognized the importance of a coordinated national program, as well as the needs for education, research, and development to enhance the ultimate quality of service to the individual library user. Four references are listed. (Author/SW)

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STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF LIBRARY NETWORKS

A Theme Conference Summary

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White House Conference on Library and Information Services

Pre-Conference Meetings on Special Themes

Structure and Governance of Library Networks

Issues for Consideration

November 6-8, 1978

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INTRODUCTION

The creation of an effective national library and information network to serve all Americans is a cornerstone of the proposed national program for library and information services described by NCLIS in 1975:

> America has an abundance of recorded information, not a shortage. However, this precious resource is concentrated in relatively few locations, often virtually inaccessible to millions of people, and is lying largely untapped. Thus, the challenge is to find the means for making these resources available to more people through an effective identification, location and distribution system. (NCLIS 1975, p. 5)

The key to effective sharing of recorded information is the development of a nationwide network of libraries and information centers, comprising, in the words of NCLIS, "an integrated system encompassing state networks, multi-state networks, and specialized networks in the public and private sectors." (NCLIS 1975, p. 49)

Because the library network concept is central to the national program for library and information services, it is clear that issues relating to the governance, design, structure, and funding of networks should command an important place on the 1979 White House Conference agenda. To further the identification and definition of these issues, as well as to provide an opportunity for librarians and other information pofessionals to participate directly in formulating this portion of the White House Conference agenda, NCLIS joined with the Graduate School of Library and Information Science of the University of Pittsburgh to co-sponsor the 1978 Pittsburgh conference on the theme, "The Structure and Governance of Library Networks," as an official pre-Conference meeting.

On November 6-8, 1978, nearly 500 librarians, information specialists, representatives of the information industry, and other interested individuals met in Pittsburgh for three days to explore issues relating to library networks. The conference was open to all who wished to attend. This paper, intended as a resource document for the White House Conference, constitutes a summary of the major

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topics discussed at the 1978 Pittsburgh conference. It is based on position papers prepared in advance and distributed to participants prior to registration for the conference, papers presented at the conference itself, comments made during six scheduled discussion sessions by members of the audience, and data gathered through a questionnaire distributed to all conference participants.[1]

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[1] The opinions of conference participants reported in this paper are largely derived from a "Summary of Pre-conference Questionnaire Responses: 1978 Pittsburgh conference on the Structure and Governance of Library Networks," prepared by M. Evalyn Clough, assistant to the dean and lecturer, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Pittsburgh, and James M. Matarazzo, assistant dean for student affairs and associate professor, School of Library Science, Simmons College, to whom grateful acknowledgment is made by the author of this paper.

THE CHARACTER OF LIBRARY NETWORKS

NCLIS defines a library network as:

> Two or more libraries and/or other organizations engaged in a common pattern of information exchange, through communications, for some functional purpose. A network usually consists of a formal arrangement whereby materials, information and services provided by a variety of types of libraries and/or other organizations are made available to all potential users. (Libraries may be in different jurisdictions but agree to serve one another on the same basis as each serves its own constitutents. Computers and telecommunications may be among the tools used for facilitating communication among them.) (NCLIS 1975, pp. 82-88)

In its simplest meaning, a library network is a mechanism created to facilitate the sharing of resources among libraries for the mutual benefit of their clienteles.

American libraries have a long tradition of sharing bibliographic data and of sharing books, journals, and other media through interlibrary lending. More recently, libraries have joined together to share storage facilities, specialized staff, or services; to purchase materials, supplies, and equipment jointly; and to realize the benefits of cooperation in many other functional and service areas. The exponential growth in the number of items published each year, the rising cost of books, periodicals, and other library materials, the increasing demands placed on libraries by their clienteles, and the development of supportive computer and telecommunications technologies have all served to simulate library network development. Several hundred such networks are now in existence in the United States. Some are international in scope, some national, some regional; many are statewide or only local. Some are limited to a single type of library (public, academic, school, or special), some to a single subject field (e.g., medicine); others encompass all subjects and more than one type of library. Some involve significant participation by the private, for-profit sector. Some library networks perform only one function (e.g., the cataloging of books); others provide a number of services to member libraries. Some networks are governed by a formal consortium or interlibrary cooperation agreements, others by contracts, still others by the full or partial merger of formerly autonomous libraries into organized library systems. A significant number have no legal or contractual basis beyond informal institutional agreements. Characteristically, network membership is entirely voluntary, with participating libraries free to withdraw at

any time. Network operations may be financed entirely by institutional membership fees or assessments, by fees for services, and/or by a combination of sources, including State and/or Federal grants and gifts from foundations. Funding is, at present, typically on a year-by-year basis. No comprehensive coherent national plan or guidelines have yet been developed or implemented to integrate or rationalize the variety of networking activities and structures that characterize the contemporary library scene.

MAJOR ISSUES

Financing the National Network

The authors of position papers, panelists, speakers, and participants at the 1978 Pittsburgh conference identified funding as their highest priority concern in the future development of a nationwide library network. No accepted general plan currently exists to provide the new funds needed to establish and maintain either the national network or the subsidiary regional, state, or local networks that it would ultimately comprise.

At the national level, a number of complex fiscal issues emerged that demand consideration and resolution. One is the question of optimal balance betwen publicly supported or publicly subsidized information agencies, such as libraries, on the one hand, and the emerging private, for-profit sector, popularly known as the "information industry," on the other. As NCLIS has observed, it seems "crucial that information activities in the public and private sectors operate in harmony wth one another and in consonance with the national interest." (NCLIS 1975, p. 26) Any increase in public support for enhanced library service through network development may be viewed by some as an inappropriate incursion by government into the arena of the private sector. Conversely, if effective access to information is both the right of every American and a vital element in the survival of a free, democratic society, then it is clearly the responsibility of government to ensure through the use of public funds that every citizen has adequate library services.

Historically, the burden of public support of library services has fallen most heavily at the local level. State, Federal, and foundation funds constitute, at present, only a small portion of total library support. The result is marked inequality of access to information within most States and among the States. The goal of equality of access to library and information services for all Americans appears to require that the States and the Federal Government assume a greater share of library costs. In particular, a new balance among Federal, State, and local funding seems essential to meet the initial costs of establishing and operating library networks. The responsibility of the States and the Federal Government for equalizing access to information needs to be made explicit by statute and through appropriations. The costs of creating and maintaining a national network cannot be met from currently available local sources of support. Increased Federal funding is consistent with the view expressed by NCLIS "that the total library and information resource in the United States is a national resource which should be developed, strengthened, organized and made available to the maximum degree possible in the public interest." (NCLIS 1975, p. x)

Priority concerns include substantially increased Federal funds to establish new operational networking programs at the national level, to expand and enlarge the national bibliographic record, to support expanded national programs of the Library of Congress and other Federal libraries, and to provide financial incentives to encourage regional, state, and local network development. To achieve true equality of access, State and Federal funds are needed to reimburse larger and more specialized libraries which will inevitably lend more materials to other libraries than they will borrow from them.

Both existing and proposed networks currently face major financial problems. Chief among these are the need for assured, long-term, multiyear funding and for more effective methods of allocating costs among network members in a manner that is commensurate with the benefits of participation. Uncertainty remains as to the method by which Federal and State funds can most effectively be channeled to the local level, as well as with respect to the ultimate role that State library agencies can or should play in the planning, development, and operation of networking programs. What priority can or should be given to funding network development when local libraries are severely pressed to finance existing services to their clienteles, and by whom should these priority questions be decided?

The Structure of the National Network and Access to Its Services

A central concern of participants in the Pittsburgh conference was the recognition that some existing library networks are exclusionist and elitist in their membership. Because the bulk of print resources are concentrated in a few large libraries, these libraries, understandably, are exerting a major influence on the design of emerging national networking structures. Smaller academic, public, school, and special libraries are apprehensive that their clienteles, who collectively constitute the majority of library users, may be granted only limited access to network resources, or, especially in the case of children, excluded from participation and access entirely. Particular concern was expressed for the clienteles of the Nation's 74,000 elementary and secondary school libraries since the national record of school library participation in network planning and network services has not, to date, been impressive.

It is, however, a generally accepted planning principle that the success of a library network depends on its ability to offer comparable benefits to all its members. So long as it appears that smaller academic, public, and school library collections contain few items of interest to large research libraries or their clienteles, there is little prospect of parity. Federal and/or State subsidy to

large net lenders in exchange for guaranteed access for all potential network participants may be necessary and appropriate to resolve this problem.

The sciences of network planning, design, and evaluation are only in the early stages of development. Much network planning is based on unverified assumptions about use patterns. Trial-and-error methods currently predominate in the absence of rigorous empirical approaches to the formulation of network performance objectives and evaluative criteria. Computer simulation appears to offer a promising alternative to present methods for estimating cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit and for addressing such complex technical design problems as multiple-function versus single-function or single-subject networks.

Network Governance

"Governance, in the context of library networks," write K. Leon Montgomery and Edwin C. Dowlin in their position paper for the Pittsburgh conference, "is the sum of the relationships between participants (and their institutions) and the network organization(s) . . . Governance permits those using and running networks to express their interests and concerns . . . to establish goals and objectives as well as the policies by which these . . . are to be achieved." (Montgomery and Dowlin 1979) It was the sense of the Pittsburgh conference that questions of network governance at national, regional, state, and local levels are among the most difficult and complex issues that librarians will need to address in the near term. Conversely, failure to resolve these questions is likely to prove the major obstacle to the optimal development of library networks to benefit library users.

At all levels, a major issue is the autonomy of individual libraries. Network participation inevitably carries with it some obligation to subordinate local interests for the collective benefit of network patterns. The prerogatives of exclusive local ownership and control of library materials must be modified when these resources are, in some sense, "pooled" with the holdings of other libraries in a networking mode. Buying decisions, for example, can no longer be made unilaterally at the local level. Moreover, if participants are to achieve the level of confidence in the continued ability of networks to ensure access to needed items that is essential to long-term financial support of networks by their members, individual libraries must make long-term acquisitions commitments. It is questionable whether participation in the network can continue in the traditional voluntary form for member libraries, given the high level of mutual dependency associated with the networking mode of operation. A major concern is the prospect that the freedom of individual libraries to establish local service priorities may be compromised by the overriding necessity to meet

obligations imposed by network membership. A second major concern, that network participation may carry with it undesirable or unsupportable requirements for modifying local bibliographic practices, may prove somewhat less troublesome than had been expected, in light of emerging technological developments.

Most participants in the 1978 Pittsburgh conference appear to be seeking to create library networking environments that will enable individual libraries to maximize the gains and minimize the risks attendant on whatever losses of institutional autonomy may accompany network membership. Governance structures that ensure full participation and democratic decisionmaking are viewed as essential to this goal. The view was strongly expressed that network governance should be characterized by the maximum possible decentralization of decisionmaking authority. It is recognized that national and statelevel leadership are essential, but not at the price of Federal or State control.

Governance questions are heavily influenced by network technology. The problem is perhaps analogous to citizen control of the military in a democractic society. How can those librarians and lay authorities (e.g., library boards, school superintendents, college administrators) who lack technological expertise participate effectively in formulating network policies that depend on an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the technology that supports and determines the very character of network operations?

Of specific concern to delegates to the White House Conference will be those issues that relate to governance at the Federal level. Given limited resources, the entire proposed national program cannot be brought into existence at one time. National priorities for the orderly stages of network development must be established. Participants in the Pittsburgh conference generally acknowledged the need for a locus of Federal responsibility for network policy planning, research, and development. Other functions might include managing a coordinated, integrated national network structure, obtaining and distributing Federal network development funds, coordinating existing Federal library programs, and, possibly, regulating library networks as a public utility.

Several specific models for a Federal library authority were identified and considered at the Pittsburgh conference. One approach would involve an expanded role for some existing Federal agency such as the Library of Congress or NCLIS. Alternatively, it was recognized that a new Federal agency may need to be created. Two models, a public corporation comparable with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting or the Communication Satellite Corp. (Bystrom 1979), and a National Library Board (Council on Library Resources 1978) were examined in some detail.

Several other major issues of national legislative concern that merit the attention of White House Conference delegates emerged in relation to network development. One is the need to make explicit, by statute, the Federal responsibility for ensuring equality of access to library and information services for all of the Nation's citizens. Adequate library and information service for all citizens will require a sharing of the costs of those services among Federal, State and local governments. Federal regulation of nonvoice telecommunications in the public interest is considered vital to library network development, as is the ultimate resolution of the copyright question in a manner that balances proprietary interests against the public interest in effective access to recorded knowledge. Congressional action may also be required to provide an adequate statutory base for interstate library networks. Irrespective of any possible assumption of operational responsibilities by NCLIS, attention must be given to the question of the future of that agency as a policy planning, research, and coordinating mechanism at the national level.

Fundamental governance issues also exist at the State level. NCLIS (1979) proposes a central role for the individual States and for State library agencies in the development and implementation of the national program. Yet some State library agencies lack the statutory authority required to assume leadership in multitype library network development, while most are neither supported nor staffed at a level appropriate to the expanded responsibilities envisioned for them. Concern was expressed at the Pittsburgh conference that State boundaries not restrict network development along natural geographic or special interest lines, and that State agencies not become the sole channel through which local and regional networks can access Federal funds.

Education, Research, and Development

Participants in the Pittsburgh conference identified a variety of urgent needs in education and training in relation to library network development. The capability of librarians to understand and to utilize network technology, as well as to manage that technology for the optimal benefit of their clienteles, must be enhanced through improved and expanded educational and inservice training programs. A special concern was expressed for the education and training of network executives.

A high priority was assigned to an expanded national research, development, and demonstration program in relation to library networks. Among target areas identified were research to enhance understanding of patterns of use of print and nonprint materials, to improve network design and evaluation capabilities, and to deepen

current understanding of the complex operational interrelationships among network functions. Additional priorities in research and development included standardization of bibliographic data formats, retrospective conversion of bibliographic records to machine-readable form, improved document delivery capability, and experimentation with new information storage and telecommunications technologies, such as videodisk, home computer, cable television, and communications satellite.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The 1978 Pittsburgh conference reflects the significance of library networking and library resource sharing as major developments in the improvement of library and information services to the Nation, as well as their centrality to the proposed national library program. This suggests, in turn, that networks should be a major agenda item for the White House Conference on Library and Information Services since equality of access to information for all citizens can be achieved only through the creation of effective structures for sharing recorded knowledge.

The 1978 Pittsburgh conference identified a number of issues and concerns that are widely shared by librarians, information specialists, and others who have a professional responsibility to meet citizen information needs. The importance of a coordinated national program was recognized, as were the needs for education, research, and development to enhance the ultimate quality of service to the individual library user.

The growth of library networks, and their growing importance to librarians and library users, has resulted in the emergence of a number of fundamental policy questions. Among these are: what should be the design and structure of a national library network (or networks); how shall these be managed; and how are they to be financed? The objective of the 1978 Pittsburgh conference was to provide a national forum for the identification, elucidation, and discussion of these issues as a contribution to the creation of an action agenda on library networking for delegates at the 1979 White House Conference.

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